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Abstract — Governance has significant implications on the advancement of social and economic development. In the Philippines, the role of the state in the utilization and management of natural resources remain strong. After the devolution of key state powers in 1991, governance at the local level has accelerated the strengthening of local governments, non-state actors and the private sector and has contributed to a movement towards addressing problems and issues in managing natural resources. This paper examines the processes of creation and operation of multi-sectoral alliances led by local governments to ensure that resources are sustained and people are protected. Research has revealed that most of these alliances were formed to respond collectively to impacts of natural and anthropogenic disturbances. Since the scale, magnitude and uncertainties of environmental problems such as watershed degradation, flooding, depletion of fish stocks, soil erosion and siltation cannot be resolved by national government alone, local actors pooled their distinct capacities and reconfigured the delivery of public services and goods. The function of alliances is boosted by local leaders who support a model of collaboration, adoption of new policies, scientific knowledge and expanded partnership. Local politics and administration have developed certain flexibilities that transcended defined territories. Alliances also play the role of critical links between local and national development agencies and plans leading to greater service to disadvantaged communities for food, welfare and security from the direct effects of natural disasters. Alliances have dynamics of continuous growth and expansion, but will experience weakness when common interest wanes.

Key words: integrated governance, resource sustainability, human security, poverty alleviation

INTRODUCTION

In this era of rapid exchange in communications and international trading, while the global community is struggling to address the impacts of climate change, coming up with collective action is fast becoming a trend at the local, regional and global scales. The scales and interconnectedness of environmental processes and issues require a collective response from stakeholders, as it is difficult to tackle the associated problems in isolation from others. In many Asian countries, there is an emerging community revolution of regaining and

asserting local rights over natural resources while local governments are forming groups to minimize further damages to land and water resources (Soriaga, 2009).

The growth of local alliances is understandable partly due to the deterioration in the quality and quantity of natural resources while local governments are expected to provide vital services directly to local people. Although the state remains the de facto owner of all natural resources in the Philippines, the devolution of environmental management to local governments signifies a major shift towards sharing and collaboration of public responsibilities (Bansuan, 2008). This has opened the gates for increased local action, which had been stifled for many years by state policies and laws. Local governments are now able to accelerate resolution approaches to local problems using innovative institutional arrangements and program strategies.

The Philippine government operates within the spirit of democratic principles. Democratization espouses participation of people and institutions in governmental affairs. The formation of many local alliances is not directly initiated by the national government, but the legal instrument as a prerequisite for its creation is granted in national laws. Local actions are significant and necessary where central government has seemingly insufficient capacities to respond to prolonged socio-economic and environmental problems and provide the immediate and basic needs of the entire population. However, there are many concerns and issues that need to be taken into account: funds, capacities, collective strategies and sustainability. Inter-local alliances have to struggle to develop actions that could attain "economies of scale" in the midst of funding constraints (MacDonald, 2009).

Natural resources such as forest, water, land, marine and biological species are interdependent and have interactive processes for growth and survival. Watershed resources have innate people-resources dynamics. Most political and administrative territories in the Philippines do not consider the management boundaries of natural resources such that governments and people are not able to prepare from undesirable phenomena resulting from land and water processes. Local alliances are moving towards this direction; recognizing that natural disasters, land degradation and open coastal resources have widespread impacts beyond politically-drawn boundaries.

1. OBJECTIVES, METHODS AND MATERIALS

This paper examines the processes and strategies of emerging multi-sectoral alliances in the Philippines. It will explore and discuss questions on how the alliances were created and how these groups have been widely accepted and integrated into local government systems. There will also be discussions and analyses of the collaboration approaches, operational challenges and results of natural resource management programs. Sustainability mechanisms are critical in this emerging context, therefore analysis of leadership roles and behaviour, funding support, and the political influence of technical personnel is included.

This paper also presents a number of multi-sectoral alliances working on natural resource management, eco-system protection and watershed rehabilitation. How do these local alliances strive to utilize the strengths of individual members and partners to address community disaster risks, upland poverty, food production and resource sustainability?

This paper primarily draws on the actual experiences of the authors on alliance building and operation while the cases of other alliances have been taken from primary and secondary sources. There have been interactions among the alliances in the Philippines in conferences and engagements facilitated by research groups, funding agencies and private groups. PowerPoint presentations and papers have added sources of data and information.

Of the many alliances in the Philippines, four (4) cases will be used - Allah Valley Landscape Development Alliance (AVLDA), Illana Bay Regional Alliance (IBRA), Davao Gulf Management Council (DGMC) and Southwestern Ligawasan Alliance of Municipalities (SLAM) – all of which are located and operating in Mindanao in the Southern Philippines. These alliances have differences in program focus, yet similarly anchored on local government operation and systems. Three alliances have been operating for at least five years while the other was formed two years ago. These four alliances, it can be said, represent the typology and dynamism of many local alliances throughout the country.

2. RESULTS, FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Local alliances have formed to integrate structure, capacity, and programs of various institutions and actors in order to achieve desirable and substantial outcomes of public actions. With large-scale, interconnected and often complex root causes and effects of environmental changes poverty issues are increasingly becoming a compelling reason for the need for institutional innovations.

2.1 Local stakeholders and local governments build alliances

There are several key factors that challenged and motivated local stakeholders and leaders to form alliances:

2.1.1 Persistence and commonality of inter-boundary problems

Local governments have defined territories, yet problems and issues related to environment and natural resources are interconnected. The sources of pollution, forest degradation and soil erosion may emanate from upstream local governments, but the adverse impacts are borne by downstream local governments and people. It is not effective and cost-efficient to put in place mitigation measures in the impacted areas because problems will persist unless upstream areas belonging to other political domains take corrective and coordinated action.

2.1.2 Weakness of national government in law enforcement

Natural resources are state owned, but their management, protection and rehabilitation by the state are limited in scope, reach and substance. Local governments are in the forefront of public services and usually carry the responsibility for the immediate response to flooding and the subsequent social dislocation. The national government lacks the capacity to recover forest, biodiversity and fish stocks and guard against illegal loggers and fishermen. Laws and policies abound, but there has always remained the alleged lack of financial resources to implement them.

2.1.3 Difficulty to police limited and confined territories

Illegal loggers and fishermen and other violators of local and national laws can easily shift from one area to another. It is extremely difficult to enforce the law when there are dissimilar levels of commitment and capabilities among neighbouring local territories. There are corresponding legal and administrative jurisdictions and domains among levels of local governments on law enforcement. In many instances, there have been dismissals of cases in the judicial court due to lack of jurisdiction.

2.1.4 High cost of government infrastructure, social disruption and environmental rehabilitation

Limited financial and technical capabilities of local governments often put a cap on measures to abate the effects of processes that are persistently incurring huge damages to water quality, land productivity and fish production. Most local governments rely on the national government for their fund sources, and internal revenues are not expected to increase in the near future. They hope to get national government attention for the funding of expensive infrastructures that have been destroyed by floods. They are also mandated to sustain the needs of evacuees for food, shelter, and clothing in response to disasters. Furthermore, it requires huge funds and resources to rehabilitate forests in watersheds.

2.1.5 Political will and readiness of stakeholders to come into common terms

Local leaders, even with differing political affiliations, have accepted the fact that environmental degradation requires the expansion of political commitment and responsibility to address trans-territorial problems. This in turn necessitates the establishment of common agreements with neighbouring local governments and other key stakeholders. Many alliances have champions and have been supported by other leaders who have similar political will to share technical and financial assistance. Since the law already provides the legality of collaboration, joint programs among independent local governments along with non-profit organizations and the private sector have been made possible.

2.2 Alliances operate without creating bureaucratic layers in public services

It normally would be very difficult to obtain the approval and support of local leaders if alliances will have significant effect and interference on the operational system and policies of government, both local and national. Alliance building is not intended to bloat and muddle the usual functions and responsibilities of governments, but rather strengthen local capacities by integration and coordination of programs and policies. The underlying foundation of alliance building is partnership among government and non-government entities by sharing and pooling of resources that will give coordinated benefits to all people within the identified program locations. Inherent powers and authority remain with member local governments within their geographical jurisdictions, but the alliance can have “extended powers” only when these are allowed and delegated by the members.

Alliances are created through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) by and between local governments and other interested parties such as national government agencies and non-government organizations (NGOs). The membership can be small or large depending on the perceived necessity to undertake a particular program. For example, the AVLDA has nineteen (19) members – 2 provinces, 1 city, 11 municipalities, 5 government agencies and 1 NGO network. In the case of SLAM, it has only four (4) municipal members. The MOA defines the functions, duties and responsibilities of each of the members. These are all within the limits of the law and capacities of the parties involved. Some agreements have a specified duration and some are open although concerned parties agree that the terms and conditions are subject to amendments and modification upon mutual consent and approval.

The Manual of Operations (MOO) guides the daily operation of alliances. The MOO lays down the organizational management structure, functions of officers and member organizations, financial transaction and planning and budgeting process. Alliances resemble the operational system of non-government or private sector entities where the highest governing body is the Board of Trustees (BOT) or Directors (BOD) composed of local chief executives (LCEs) of the respective local governments, Directors and Heads of government agencies, Chairpersons or Executive Officers of non-government organizations.

Although the approval of projects, programs and budget is executed by the BOD/BOT, the financial transaction is lodged on the trustee Local Government Unit (LGU). Alliances primarily depend on regular funding contributions of the LGUs, but other sources are generated as well. In the AVLDA, provinces contribute P500,000 while municipalities/city share P200,000 annually. In SLAM, municipalities contribute P25,000 monthly. Disbursement of government funds follows through the approved government accounting and auditing procedures to avoid irregularities making it "business as usual."

Alliances have unique processes of strategic planning and program implementation because it has it own system and procedures that do not necessitate the re-alignment of government systems. Each alliance has a strategic plan that outlines common programs applicable to all levels and partners and those specific to the local level and communities. Project proposals are prepared through the Technical Working Group (TWG) composed of all planning and environment officers. Policies, programs and projects are developed and implemented with models that are usually carried out by the member local governments. National government provides technical assistance while NGOs complement with models, programs and policies as they generate their own funding sources.

Program and policy modelling is important in order to harmonize and integrate the functions and responsibilities of the alliance members. It also enhances institutional effectiveness and efficiency and serves to become the yardstick of compliance of the members to the agreements. The AVLDA has model programs on forest management and river re-vegetation, which are being replicated by the LGU members. The IBRA and DGMC have formulated common policies on coastal resources management that are adopted by coastal LGU members. The SLAM has general policies on marshland conservation and protection measures implemented by its LGU members.

2.3 Alliance programs support environmental and socio-economic development

The collaboration of various local governments created new configurations in the system and mode of governmental affairs making this initiative an innovation generally recognized by the national government as best management practices. Both the AVLDA and IBRA won prestigious awards as outstanding local governance programs in 2008 and 2002 respectively.

Alliance programs are oriented towards poverty alleviation, resource sustainability and broadly, human security. Local governments should also be able to hurdle many barriers and difficulties in order to become credible agents of national government in uplifting the socio-economic conditions of the poor, disadvantaged sectors and indigenous peoples.

The AVLDA for example operates with the purview of protecting the forest and strengthening riverbanks in partnership with communities, NGOs and the private sector. The nature of management in the Allah Valley landscape integrates the potential of communities to generate income and increase their assets while water supply continues to serve thousands of irrigators downstream and the conservation of biological species in the marsh. River management with riparian zone stabilization protects people from the direct impacts of flashfloods.

Meanwhile, both the DGMC and IBRA enforce protection laws on coastal bays and marine resources to ensure sustainability of endemic species and availability of fish stocks for small-scale fishermen. The conservation of the marshland initiated by the SLAM ensures the survival of endemic species, adaptation of people to floods, and restriction of external users to open-access resources.

The AVLDA in partnership with ESSC has conducted geographic information systems and remote sensing-based (GIS-RS) land cover mapping that has become a critical source of detailed information that present land use which has direct and indirect bearings on land and water-related problems throughout the landscape. Such information overlaid with other thematic geographic information become valuable data sources for the formulation of the LGUs' Comprehensive Land Use Plans and Forest Land Use Plans that identify land allocation for various production and protection purposes. The agriculture and fisheries agency of the national government have also conducted coastal resource assessments which fortify the positions of the IBRA and DGMC to initiate program partnership.

But the funding problems often exhibit constraints in the substance, reach and dependability of the alliance development programs. The contributions of the LGUs are too limited as they are dependent on their Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) shares from the national government. There are even delays in the remittance of fund contributions from the LGU partners due to sudden needs to realign budgets for unanticipated activities, thereby revealing in most cases that the alliance program is seen as a secondary priority.

2.4 Collaboration dynamics and overcoming the challenges

Alliances often start off with difficulties in identifying strategies and workable projects because members have dissimilar opinions, perceptions or priority concerns in relation to the complex and interconnected issues and problems they collectively face. But with the technical experience of partners and a broader understanding of the situation with the help of scientific research, specific strategies are eventually identified and implemented.

At the institutional level, alliances have re-established and strengthened the coordination and consultation among government agencies, which have been pervasive problems in the past. The alliance serves as the coordinating, planning and policy making body among independent LGUs, national government agencies, NGOs and even the private sector. The coordination system is an innovation since this has established new commitments and integrated actions that virtually produce substantial sharing of resources and technical knowledge. In AVLDA, for example, one municipality formulates plans based on the general planning documents and technical information of the landscape, which analyses upstream and downstream interactions. The NGOs are also assisted in the formulation of resource management plans of projects based on the priority programs of the alliance.

Collective actions though do not completely produce expected impacts at similar levels in all project areas if the plans and budgets of participating members are dominated by other municipal programs, which are deemed higher in priority by the concerned local governments. National governments also do not have regular programs and budgets to carry out their commitments. The alliance endeavours to balance this by assisting implementing agencies and applying pressure to realize their commitments. Every quarter, monitoring and evaluation of projects are conducted as a regular management processes in the AVLDA.

The alliance formation has brought about an "enlightened politics" among local political leaders resulting in changes in the way territorial governance is perceived to have possession of relative independence as per defined powers and authority. Local leaders become willing to take the responsibility of governance beyond political boundaries to resolve in a proper context and situation prevailing problems that are impossible to overcome without enlarging their political horizons. As others believe this new alliance configuration and transformation is becoming an opportunity to influence political decision-making and support, there is indeed the political strength that readily captures national government attention for local action. In the AVLDA for example, the fund release for infrastructure financing for flood control was the work of local leaders who appealed directly to the Philippine president.

But some alliance members can be "program riders" if the strength of coordination and cooperation starts to loosen up. At the very start, the selection of members may have been rushed and there were no clear criteria for selection. The political willingness of some leaders may have been present, but the actual undertaking of commitments – funding, law enforcement, and programs – is not religiously performed. Although only few examples of this are true in AVLDA and DGMC, the IBRA has experienced a significant degree of weakness primarily due to controversies and difficulties in law enforcement, partly due to political priorities and differences. The provincial government as a lead agency in the implementation of the IBRA program is currently on the process of gathering support from government, private sector, communities and LGUs in order to revive efforts (Cañales, 2009).

The financial resources of many alliances are limited, and often require external assistance to bridge the funding gap for most of its programs and projects. The large scale of inter-boundary problems usually require expensive solutions, but alliances continue struggling to operate within meagre resources contributed by the members, although as mentioned earlier there are normally delays in remittances.

The innovation in funding scheme is reflected in the willingness of LGUs to pay for efforts that are not implemented within their political areas of jurisdiction. In the AVLDA, funding contributions of the downstream LGUs are usually spent on the projects of upstream LGUs. This financial operation is similar to "payments for ecological services" as forest protection and recovery has eventual services to downstream communities such as consistent water supply, soil retention and climate regulation. The limit of funds for the alliances is resolved by: (1) increasing the budget of LGU members related to alliance mandates and model project replication; (2) requesting financial and technical assistance from development agencies and national government; (3) assisting NGOs to develop capacities for donor fund access; (4) forging partnerships and fund leveraging with other stakeholders – civic groups, private sector, academe; and (5) undertaking financial efficiency measures such as cost-cutting and priority budgeting.

The legality of alliances is often challenged because many of these do not have the formal recognition of a government regulatory agency although their formation has legal basis. The MOA is a legal instrument, but it does not have mandatory binding conditions and a penalty clause because it is framed on the assumed willingness of all parties concerned to cooperate among themselves. The nature of the agreement has critical bearing on the sustainability of alliances especially that electoral exercises are held on a three-year cycle. The AVLDA has survived two elections with new leaders still respecting and assuming the commitment of past leadership because they have seen the continued devastation due to floods and siltation of rivers.

The strategies of sustaining commitments have something to do with the ability of technical personnel to influence decision-making, persuasion of the leadership among its peers, and sustained advocacy and public awareness that put pressure on elected leaders to support the collaboration program. Most public officials do not prefer to translate the alliance into pure non-profit management because there is legal prohibition that funds allocated by the LGUs to NGOs cannot be administered by those who have authorised the allocation of said funds. Such an action would pose legal constraints on the part of the alliance to continue to source funds from its members. In the case of DGMC however, it is registered with Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) as a non-profit organization. However, its financial operation is directly administered by the member NGO with a separate BOT.

3. LESSONS LEARNED, SUSTAINABILITY AND PROSPECTS

The necessity for the alliance is seen from the viewpoint of a weakness in central government and the opportunities provided to local governments under the new policy set-up on fisheries development, forest management, upland agriculture and environmental protection. Alliances offer governmental services and public goods that have not been available before the devolution of state powers. Coordinative functions of government agencies in addition to the integration of NGO and private sector programs have been realized and staged to a new level of public management. The dynamics of cooperation illustrates a win-win situation among various sectors, but also demonstrates that political commitment setting can be expanded outside the limits of administrative boundaries.

The alliance operation clearly depends on the ability of those in charge and the interest of leaders to continue to participate. Its daily activities are usually supervised by the Program Management Office (PMO), which is a crucial element in the organizational management structure as it shows the working presence of the alliance among the members, partners and people. The alliance can only improve its authority, credibility and dependability when it has made concrete accomplishments that address the concerns of all members and affected stakeholders. When activities pertaining to law enforcement, livelihood development, disaster reduction, environmental conservation or any of the priority programs of the alliance are not felt and appreciated by its stakeholders, the reliance, trust and support to the alliance will gradually fade away.

The sustainability of the alliance is at times at the verge of collapse because the binding agreement does not have the mandatory clause of non-adherence to its provisions. It has been seen however, that motivating leaders and convincing them of the dire need to respond collectively to trans-boundary problems and issues is not only useful, but necessary. Supportive leaders are important, but more so the champion or champions of the program. This champion who is respected, admired and has credibility of opinion, views and decisions should sit on the top position of the alliance. The LGUs are also integrating, unifying and codifying the alliance programs in ordinances, laws, plans and policies. In case alliance structure ceases to function, the unified mandates remain in force through its members and partners.

In the future, would local governments realize and find that alliance-building is a redundancy and duplication of public service or that the alliance services are perceived to be competing with regular LGU programs? In AVLDA, some leaders think that the alliance can be dissolved when the environment and planning offices of all LGUs are already strong, capable, and reliable. This, however, may not be possible in the immediate years ahead.

Resource sustainability and human security are broad concerns that challenged and triggered the formation of alliances. The creation of alliances is an innovation, which correspondingly created other innovations in the public service system and mode of public goods production. The extent of deforestation and improper fish harvesting in the Philippines is far, wide and intensive causing too much pressure on natural resources to survive and recover, and the same time accelerating adverse impacts on poor and disadvantaged communities. Illegal activities have complex root causes and become more complicated when enforcers themselves are involved. Small and isolated private decisions in fishing grounds and forest areas can also have far-reaching negative environmental and ecological impacts collectively in the long term. Daily responses to those activities can stress local governments in terms of budget, trustworthiness and capacities.

Even with the legal personality constraint, the alliances can continue to progress forward – initiating strategic structural management in the public sector and providing development

options that primarily benefit poor communities. They can play specific roles in the regionalization of services which foster incremental solutions to problems rather than policy reforms (MacDonald, 2009).

Alliances can amass strength by expanding its partnership to other institutions engaged with communities in project activities. For example, the AVLDA started with nineteen (19) members in 2004, but it has now sixty-eight (68) partners, each bringing, sharing and opening new opportunities, funds, technical skills, human labour and facilities. With respected leaders in the action and policy levels, the alliances can fill-in gaps in public sector management and substantiate, complement and strengthen efforts that will control degradation and unsustainable use of natural resources. On the broader scale, they can increase capacities of the poor to cope with risks and uncertainties and secure their assets and livelihoods.

Externally, the opportunities for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the implementation of Clean Development Mechanisms (CDM) require a large, yet strongly-organized and capable institution like the alliance, in partnership with funding agencies and carbon buyers. For example, the AVLDA has started negotiating with a carbon-trading broker for the reforestation and afforestation of denuded forestlands in the protected watershed areas. This has been the result of linking with credible academic institutions involved in rainforestation leadership training and implementation.

In conclusion, the emerging LGU alliances have yet to show in the long term that they have indeed a stable and sustainable management role in the public sector, and that their contributions to society are justifiable and necessary in the socio-economic development process.

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